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THE
SHAKESPEAREAN
WORLD.

AN INTERPRETATION
OF
"A WINTER'S TALE."

MRS. H. KATE RICHMOND-WEST.



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“A WINTER’S TALE.”

EDITED BY

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BY MRS. H. KATE RICHMOND-WEST.

INTRODUCTION.

THE ever-growing influence of Shakespeare's genius, the sympathy it secures from all classes of people, the power it infuses into heart and brain of those who enter into the Shakespearean world, fill us with longing to lead humanity to its heritage; to make as familiar as household words the breathings of this mighty spirit; trusting some imagination may be kindled, some life enriched, through these interpretations of the great genius, William Shakespeare.

This work is the outgrowth of such successes within smaller circles that we feel sure an effort to reach the masses will be keenly appreciated. The strongest impulse to this course came from a group of illiterate people, a class of fifty colored men and women. Their earnest attention and marvellous appreciation of each story as it was unfolded to them, and the direct knowledge of the uplifting and joy those hours brought them, proved how universal is the craving for food that shall satisfy the busy working throng; lifting them above the cares of the day into a new world, where they are strengthened and refreshed.

Simply, then, this publication may be considered an introduction into the Shakespearean World:—a world where humanity never disappoints you; where all the forms are truth and nature, which as long as literature

shall last will feed the hungry soul. Count it a priceless advantage to become a member of this exalted community; to quit your politics, your shop, your kitchen and your ball-room, and enter at will the royal palace, and the shepherd's hut.

Humanity ordinarily lacks the opportunity to meet with a sublime soul: yet through the power of Shakespeare any one of us can illumine a quiet hour with the companionship of souls more choice than we would meet with in experience if we lived for centuries.

And this is the privilege of humanity—not narrowed to a class, but the common heritage of all.

A WINTER'S TALE.

THIS pastoral drama is supposed, with reasons almost conclusive, to be among the latest works of Shakespeare. It is written in the poet's ripest style, and shows that knowledge of the inner lives of men and women which must be the result of experience. It is not as well known as the plays which the stage of to-day represents, but it is crammed with excellences, rich in characterization, and varied in its scenic effects. One must know it well before its full beauty can be caught; and each being of the drama should become a familiar friend.

In the opening scenes we are introduced into the court of Leontes, King of Sicilia, and the fair Queen Hermione, who shares his throne, and has the undivided love of her people. A pure, sweet woman—"not too bright nor good for human nature's daily food"; from whose life such repose and dignity, such purity and sweetness, such wifehood and motherhood and blessed friendship breathe forth, as might elevate and crown with beauty the women of God's earth.

The mighty magician weaves his spell around us, and we are in the enchanted circle. Our real walls, poor or rich though they be, fade away; and stately arches, and rich tapestry, and all that fertile imagination can create for us, lend their beauty to the scene. King Leontes and the fair Hermione are urging a lengthened visit from

their guest Polixenes, the King of Bohemia. Polixenes and Leontes have been friends from early boyhood, but for some years have been separated; still keeping up an "interchange of letters and loving embassies." At the moment of our introduction to King Polixenes he is making his adieus at the close of a nine months' visit. Leontes urges a longer stay, and, failing to persuade his friend, appeals to his queen. "Tongue-tied, our queen? Speak you." Thus urged, Hermione adds entreaty to entreaty. Her words, playful but persistent, overcome the decision of King Polixenes, and he gracefully yields to her persuasion.

At the moment when Queen Hermione has won the consent of King Polixenes to lengthen his visit, there bursts into a devouring flame the jealousy which has been smouldering in Leontes' heart. This outburst falls upon the happy scene as the hail-storm in a soft June day—sudden, black, threatening, then tearing all before it.

The passion of jealousy is ugly, distorted and low; and it poisons the heart and brain of its victim. It has been said by some of the critics that this jealousy of King Leontes was unnatural, too abrupt. But the careful reader is carried into the past of each of these human woes. This is but the moment of its birth in the soul. The spark was lighted long ago; and now, fanned to a flame, it blazes beyond control. Who of us can be conscious of all the power within us for good or evil? How much lies dormant until the awakening? During this nine months' visitation doubtless the King has felt his guest more than once in the way—tired perhaps of the divided attention of the Queen. One may easily conceive of a soul, to whom jealousy is possible, finding more or

less to feed upon during this lengthened visit. Besides, we all recognize the fact that we have no right to expect reason where jealousy reigns. The light of the soul goes out in its darkness.

Leontes bids Hermione to entertain Polixenes in the garden. With his eyes following them (a distorted vision now), fondling his boy, Mamillius, his words lay bare to us his secret soul. There are no hidden places—there is no reserve in nature. The mighty portrayer gives us truth. It may be truth, lofty and sublime; it may be virtue, magnanimity, loyalty, love; it may be vice and lowest passions, but he gives us truth. The innocent, unsuspecting Queen and the loyal friend, all unconscious, walk together in the sunshine.

In the frenzy of his jealousy, Leontes attacks his counsellor, Camillo, who maintains his own calm center, and stands firmly on the basis of his trust in himself and those about him. Utterly unprepared for this condition of Leontes' mind, Camillo fails to catch the spirit of his innuendos. Unconscious of the king's interpretation of his words, Camillo reveals clearly to us the simplicity of his noble spirit; and his utterances become torches to illumine for us the dark and devious methods of this self-feeding passion, jealousy:

Leontes. "Camillo, this great sir will yet stay longer."

Cam. "You had much ado to make his anchor hold,

When you cast out it still came home."

Leontes. "Didst note it?"

The bitterness in Leontes' sharp tone, not the question, causes Camillo to give him a sudden look of inquiry, then to answer calmly:

“He would not stay at your petitions; made
His business more material.”

Another flash from Leontes:

“Didst perceive it?”

See how marvellously the brain process is revealed to us in the reflection which follows, which is a communion with himself, and must be so understood:

“They’re here with me already, whispering,
rounding,

Sicilia is a so-forth! ’Tis far gone

When I shall gust it last.”

He infers from Camillo’s simple reply that the court has observed and commented upon the relation of Polixenes and Hermione, and has given himself already a name so odious that the very thought of it still more inflames his passion. From this moment every word from Camillo only adds fuel to the flame. In spite of the false imputations of the king, though charged with cowardice, dishonesty and treachery, Camillo still preserves his dignified equipoise. He boldly answers all the accusations in one stupendous sentence, full of virtue and wisdom, and great in the patience which means all that can be gleaned from the word obedience.

The king, as remote from the regions where Camillo dwells as Camillo dwells remote from him, now puts into words his whole thought, and clothes it in such form as fits its substance. Camillo, roused by this slander of his queen, rises now to the sublime:

“I would not be a stander-by to hear
My sovereign mistress clouded so, without
My present vengeance taken.”

Then melting into compassion for the king’s ungrounded calumny, firmly rebukes him:

“Shrew my heart,
 You never spoke what did become you less,
 Than this; which to reiterate were sin
 As deep as that, though true.”

Leontes finds in these words only new food for his wrath, and pours out a torrent of vile suggestions upon the alarmed Camillo.

Doubting now the sanity of his king, his mind is full of questions as to the best method of dealing with him. As Leontes reaches the climax of his thought and purpose, which is the murder of Polixenes, he says:

“Thou mightst bespice a cup,
 To give mine enemy a lasting wink.”

Camillo is prepared for him and assents, to calm the king, to close the interview, to think alone, and consider the best course for the good of all. Here Leontes leaves him. At this critical moment Camillo's heart yearns toward his imperilled queen. His soul is overflowing with a great sympathy for her, which he unselfishly pours out before considering his own horrible position:

“O miserable lady! But for me,
 What case stand I in? I must be the poisoner
 Of good Polixenes; and my ground to do't
 Is the obedience to a master; one,
 Who in rebellion with himself, will have
 All that are his so too. To do this deed
 Promotion follows. If I could find example
 Of thousands that had struck anointed kings
 And flourished after, I'd not do't. But since
 Nor brass nor stone nor parchment bears not one,
 Let villainy itself forswear't.”

What sermon upon the power of virtue could touch the

soul more keenly than this dignity of virtuous thought, lighting us through the darkness like a torch? This is but one instance. The Shakespearean world is crowded with such examples of virtue glowing triumphantly over the depths of vice.

But the play moves on. King Polixenes, who is supposed to have met the King Leontes in the ante-chamber, wonders at the brusqueness of his manner, and ponders on the cause. In this condition of mind he comes to Camillo and questions him. When urged to the bitter truth, Camillo confesses Leontes' suspicion that Polixenes "has touched his queen forbiddenly." Polixenes utters these memorable words:

"O then my best blood turn
To an infected jelly; and my name
Be yoked with his that did betray the best."

Camillo urges Polixenes, for the sake of the queen, for both their sakes, to flee the court and seek Bohemia, and without delay prepares for their escape.

This is the position of affairs at the close of the first act. Of Hermione, the central figure of the play, the grand, womanly woman, we have seen as yet but little; still the impress is strong, and she has our heart sympathy at once. Fair, beautiful, heroic queen! Would your spirit could be spread abroad, that every mother, wife and daughter might catch but a breath, and rejoice to claim you as their own. It is the feminine element in Shakespeare which, beyond all others, insures the immortality of his genius. For as woman is closer to nature than man, so a literature that would endure must combine the masculine and feminine.

This is the one play of the great master's where the force

of the sympathy, truth, and patience of a woman's invincible spirit holds her above all the contending elements of the moving drama about her. We have in Henry VIII, the noble Queen Catherine as a central figure, but the great Buckingham and Wolsey divide the glory. Hermione stands alone looking down majestically upon the tumultuous court. Here the first act closes, leaving the dear queen all unconscious of her wrongs; Leontes, feeding the flame of his jealousy; Polixenes and the good Camillo, fleeing under the protecting shadow of the night.

Act second opens in the queen's private apartment, where, surrounded by her women, she is telling childish stories to Mamillius, her son. Into this scene full of sweetness and repose, breaks the angry king, now terrible in his wrath, having learned of the flight of Polixenes and Camillo; and hurls these words at the unsuspecting queen:

"Give me the boy: I am glad you did not nurse him:
Though he does bear some signs of me, yet you
Have too much blood in him."

He then roughly seizes the child as if to part them, Mamillius clings wildly to his mother, while she, with wonder, fear, and imploring love, reaches towards her child her sheltering arms. Thus addressed in the presence of her child, her women, and the attendant noblemen of the king, the queen rises, and with horror and surprise asks—

"What is this? sport?"

No reply but the awful accusation hurled mercilessly at her, that Polixenes is father to her unborn child.

Hermione cannot believe her senses, and calmly denies the charge. 'Tis then the infuriated king, losing all control, adds insult to injury, and, appealing to the astonished noblemen, before the whole group, dares to assert Hermione

an adulteress. The women, weeping, gather about her, the courtiers are all in sympathy with her, as this matchless woman, self-poised, strong-centred, answers from her purity:

“Should a villain say so
The most replenished villain in the world,
He were as much more villain: you my lord
Do but mistake.”

Leontes, unheeding her words, accuses her further of being privy to the escape of Camillo and Polixenes. Hermione, with a dignity that reaches and blesses all humanity, makes reply so simple, loving and true, so free from all bitterness and reproach, that it stands as a tablet of beauty, a light for the world.

“No, by my life,
Privy to none of this: how will this grieve you
When you shall come to clearer knowledge, that
You have thus published me? Gentle my lord,
You scarce can right me thoroughly then, to say
You did mistake.”

With angry retort the king, calling upon his guards, bids them bear her away to prison. Hermione, serene, strong, tender, unwilling to believe the cruel words are from her husband's heart, in her entire love for him, seeking some outward explanation, some force of circumstance, says:

“There's some ill planet reigns.
I must be patient till the heavens look
With an aspect more favorable. Good my lords,
I am not prone to weeping as our sex
Commonly are; the want of which vain dew
Perchance shall dry your pities; but I have

That honorable grief lodged here which burns
Worse than tears drown."

Still no reproach for all this cruelty; too deep the
wound. Turning to her weeping attendants she says,

"Do not weep, good fools;

There is no cause. When you shall know your
mistress

Has deserved prison, then abound in tears,
As I come out. This action I now go on
Is for my better grace. Adieu, my lord,
I never wished to see you sorry; now
I trust I shall."

Proudly she leads the way, and the guards reluctantly
do their master's bidding, and bear the queen to prison.

The courtiers plead for their queen. No doubt is in
any mind as to her purity and sanctity. All hearts bleed
for her. To justify to his people his tyrannous proceed-
ings, Leontes dispatches two messengers, Cleomenes and
Dion, to the Delphic Oracle to learn what the great Apollo
may reveal.

In the meantime, Hermione in the prison gives birth to
a daughter prematurely, forced by the terrible anguish of
these bitter weeks, and her maternal grief that her son
Mamillius has been kept from her, augmented by the
rumors of his illness and pining for his mother. Weep for
her! weep for her! let your hearts melt with pity for this
dear woman, this wife, this mother, titles of honor, where
the queen is all forgot. Weep for her! as holding her new-
born child she says "my poor prisoner, I am as innocent as
you."

But "Stone walls cannot a prison make." Hermione is
a free spirit no iron bars can fetter. The immured, the

prison-bound is he whose soul is hampered, the cruel jealous king. Hermione, speaking from her anguish, within the gloomy prison walls, utters words which reveal the repose of her innocence; but for Leontes when he next speaks from his palace chamber, there needs no prison grating, no clanking chain to prove his spirit fettered. "Nor night nor day no rest." His diseased mind is now his prison house, his accusing conscience his sleepless jailer.

One of the most remarkable feminine characterizations of Shakespeare is Paulina, who in her devotion to the queen, in her courage and self-reliance, in her vindication of the truth, and her fearless "holding up the glass" to Leontes, stands unrivalled among the whole feminine creation of the Shakespearean world. Her motives will bear the closest investigation, the sunshine of a loving spirit gleams through her every word. But know her well, make her your friend, she will be as faithful to you as to her king and queen. You may trust her infinitely. She is the wife of Antigonus, a nobleman, and is honored by the closest friendship of Hermione. Full of tenderest sympathy she comes to the prison to bring some comfort to her royal friend, but finds the orders are strictly given that no one shall be allowed to see the queen; but she is permitted to see an attendant, and so learn of her condition. In conversation with Emilia she learns that the queen has given birth to a daughter, prematurely. Paulina asserts boldly that the king is insane, that some one must show him the truth, and that the duty falls upon her as friend to both:

‘I’ll tak ’t upon me;

If I prove honey-mouthed, let my tongue blister
And never to my red-looking anger be
The trumpet any more.”

Then, quick as thought can be born, comes to her the possibility of the helpless infant's mute intercession for its mother:

"We do not know

How he may soften at the sight o' the child;

The silence often of pure innocence

Persuades, when speaking fails."

Hermione gladly gives her consent, and Paulina bears her charge to the palace. She is denied admittance by the attendant noblemen, Antigonus her husband among the number, who advise her of Leontes' command that no one should come about him.

Antigonus.

"You must not enter."

Paulina. "Nay, rather, good my lords, be second to me;

Fear you his tyrannous passion more, alas,

Than the queen's life? A gracious innocent soul;

More free than he is jealous?"

Here is a tender, womanly heart that pleads for another, an intrepid soul whose fearlessness is born of the truth of her convictions, and she will not be restrained. Rejecting their counsel, she enters, bearing the child in her arms. Leontes, astonished at her boldness, commands Antigonus to compel her to withdraw. Antigonus, whose position was already very trying, the right hand of the king, his confident and first attendant, yet feeling all sympathy for Hermione, deserves our pity when forced to maintain the king's commands even against his wife, he says,

"I told her so, my lord.

On your displeasure's peril and on mine

She should not visit you."

Leontes, out of his own bitterness flings an arrow at Paulina as the representative of the sex he had so outraged.

Turning to Antigonus he says: "What, canst not rule her?" Paulina answers, vigorously, but with the delicacy inherent in her womanhood,—

"From all dishonesty he can. In this
(Unless he take the course that you have done,
Commit me for committing honor), trust it,
He shall not rule me."

Antigonus shows in his next sentence *more* than his present trust, the growth of his confidence through a married life:

"Lo you now; you hear!
When she will take the rein I let her run;
But she'll not stumble."

Besides Paulina's strength of will rising to the heroic, besides her depth of love as portrayed in the wife and the friend, she now reveals her wisdom:

"Good my liege, I come,
And I beseech you hear me; who profess
Myself your loyal servant, your physician,
Your most obedient counsellor; yet that dare
Less appear so in comforting your evils,
Than such as most seem yours."

Is she not brave and true and tender? "Loyal servant"—does not the expression mean much? "Physician," who cures and heals; "Counsellor," who comes, not flattering the weakness of a king, but daring to cut into the very heart of his folly. As she continues, "I say, I come from your good queen." Am I not right? Should not humanity be enriched by the knowledge of this ennobling spirit? Leontes flings back her words, "*Good* queen?" Paulina, nothing daunted, repeats her words with stronger force:

“Good queen! my lord, good queen! I say good queen;
And would by combat make her good, were I
A man, the worst about you.”

Is she not justice personified, holding aloft the scales and the sword? Is she not upholding a race of women in her justification of Hermione? We confess to have breathed deeper, truer breaths of freedom for the comprehension of this huge spirit. With unfaltering heart she repeats yet again:

“*The good queen,*

For she is good, hath brought you forth a daughter.
Here 'tis; commends it to your blessing.”

Then Paulina lays down the child before the throne. Leontes becomes furious at the sight of it, and orders Antigonus to bear away the bastard. Paulina turns then to her husband:

“Forever

Unvenerable be thy hands if thou
Tak'st up the princess, by that forced baseness
Which he has put upon it.”

From the first to the last she maintains her free thought and speech. Leontes then threatens her:

“I'll have thee burned.”

In Paulina's retort lies a volume. The old ecclesiastical fires had not yet burned low, and the broad-minded Shakespeare puts into these words of Paulina his own thought in the great question:

“I care not,

It is an heretic that makes the fire,
Not she that burns in it.”

With a final appeal to the weak-hearted ones who dare only to reflect him, she bids the tyrant farewell:

"You that are thus so tender o'er his follies
Will never do him good; not one of you."

Leontes revenges himself now upon the weaker vessel, and turning to Antigonus, makes him swear a solemn oath, under the penalty of forfeiting his own life and the lives of his wife and the child. Antigonus swears to obey the mandate of the king, to bear the infant to some distant shore, there to leave her, "Where chance might nurse or end her." With anguish in his face, he says:

"I swear to do this, though a present death
Had been more merciful."

His heart bleeds as he folds in his arms the little innocent, and we respect his tenderness as he utters these words:

"Come on, poor babe;
Some powerful spirit instruct the kites and ravens
To be thy nurses! Wolves and bears, they say,
Casting their savageness aside, have done
Like offices of pity."

Antigonus goes forth, bearing the child to its cruel destiny. This ends the second act of the drama; and if we have followed it closely, the reader is now a part of the movement, in closest sympathy with each life; one in the dramatic unity.

The opening scene of the third act gives us a glimpse of the messengers sent by Leontes to the Delphic Oracle. They are returning to the court bearing the sealed judgment of Apollo. Now Leontes has summoned Hermione for public trial, and all the people are gathered in the court-room to witness the proceedings. The interest is intense as the king commands an officer to produce the prisoner. We cannot be one of the deeply sympathetic group unless we allow ourselves to feel as they have felt during this interval

of separation from the queen — an absorbing interest; a love made painful by the very powerlessness of it to help the sufferer. Hermione has the devoted trust of her entire people; and as, pale and worn from her anxiety, in a weakened condition from her recent confinement, she is led into the court by the guard, the feeling is too deep for words. The faithful Paulina accompanies the queen, and watches her every breath. The indictment is read; and Hermione responds. It is a marvellous plea — a perfect mosaic of words, no one of which could be spared. Not for one moment does she lose her self-control, nor forget she is wife, mother, queen:

“Since what I am to say must be but that
Which contradicts my accusation, and
The testimony on my part no other
But what comes from myself, it shall scarce boot me
To say ‘not guilty.’ Mine integrity
Being counted falsehood shall as I express it
Be so received. But thus: if powers divine
Behold our human actions (as they do),
I doubt not then but innocence shall make
False accusation blush, and tyranny
Tremble at patience. For behold me!
A fellow of the royal bed, which owe
A moiety of the throne, a great king’s daughter,
The mother to a hopeful prince, here standing
To prate and talk for life and honor ’fore
Who please to come and hear.”

As we listen to these words from Hermione’s lips, we can almost hear her heart beat; and only that she teaches us an infinite patience, we should feel an angry tide sweep over us as we hear the sentence of the self-deceived king:

“For as thy brat hath been cast out, like to itself,
 No father owning it, * * * so thou
 Shalt feel our justice; in whose easiest passage
 Look for no less than death.”

Then Hermione pours out all the anguish of her spirit,
 and the lines are red with the emptied wine of her life:

“Sir, spare your threats.
 The bug which you would fright me with I seek.
 To me can life be no commodity.
 The crown and comfort of my life, your favor,
 I do give lost; for I do feel it gone,
 But know not how it went: My second joy,
 And first fruits of my body, from his presence
 I am barred like one infectious; my third comfort
 Starr’d most unluckily is from my breast,
 The innocent milk in its most innocent mouth,
 Haled out to murder; myself on every post
 Proclaimed a strumpet; with immodest hatred
 The child-bed privilege denied, which ’longs
 To women of all fashion;—lastly hurried
 Here to this place i’ the open air, before
 I have got strength of limit. Now my liege,
 Tell me what blessings I have here alive,
 That I should fear to die? Therefore proceed.
 But yet hear this: Mistake me not;—No! Life,
 I prize it not a straw;—but for mine honor
 (Which I would free), if I shall be condemned
 Upon surmises—all proofs sleeping else
 But what your jealousies awake—I tell you
 ’Tis rigour and not law. Your honors all,
 I do refer me to the oracle.
 Apollo be my judge.”

While the officers of the court are dispatched for the oracle, Hermione lifts up her agonized soul — as she recalls her girlish days, her childhood home, her father —

“The emperor of Russia was my father.

O that he were alive and here, beholding

His daughter’s trial! that he did but see

The flatness of my misery — yet with eyes

Of pity, not revenge!”

No wish for a father to justify or revenge the bitter wrong; only the cry of the daughter for the dear love and sympathy forever gone.

These were heathen times, and we must keep close to the atmosphere of the drama, and let ourselves feel all the mingled hope and fear experienced by the court, as the officers return with the sealed and sacred message of the divine Apollo. Hermione stands the central figure in the group, calm in the consciousness of her innocence, surrounded by the ladies of the court, supported by Paulina, while all eyes are fixed upon the returning officers. After the court forms, Leontes gives the command to open and read the oracle. “*Hermione is chaste, Polixenes blameless, Camillo a true subject, Leontes a jealous tgrant, his innocent babe truly begotten; and the king shall live without an heir if that which is lost be not found.*” Then the whole court in grand chorus breaks into a pæan of thanksgiving: “Now blessed be the great Apollo.” Hermione, folding her arms across her saintly breast, murmurs, “Praised.” The king impiously refutes the words of the oracle: “This is mere falsehood.” As if in direct proof that these are indeed the words of Apollo, a messenger enters, bearing the tidings of the sudden death of the prince Mamillius. This verification of the oracle terrifies Leon-

tes into submission, and he falls upon his knees, and with uplifted hands seems trying to avert the thunder-bolts of the gods. Hermione, who has borne all to this last worst stroke (the death of her son), faints in Paulina's arms, and by the command of the king is carried into her chamber, followed by her loyal subjects.

It seems impossible at this point ever to take Leontes to our love or respect again. But we do;—and it is that wonderful process by which we are made to do so, wherein lies one of the Shakespearean methods of enlarging our natures. We see clearly and conclusively all the processes of the soul; and as we know now, if we have studied Leontes carefully, the damning power of a passion, so it is also our privilege to contemplate from this point the healing, purifying power of remorse. It searches his soul and casts out the evil spirit, and we do take him to our hearts again, and forgive him. It is so human to err; it is so divine to forgive. His prayer still on his lips, Paulina enters, wringing her hands, and crying,

“Woe! Woe! the queen is dead.”

She now thrusts the iron into his very soul, and lays bare before the agonized king the awful consequences of his passion, until, seeing that remorse is torturing him almost beyond endurance, she melts her reproaches into pity, and the strength intended for rebuke becomes the rock of his consolation. Here we leave Leontes in solitude, crushed with the burden of himself, mourning the death of his queen and his son, and uncertain of the fate of the little innocent one abandoned in the wilderness.

We are prepared for meeting Antigonus, bearing the child into the vast,

“Where chance may nurse or end it;”

and we now find him in the remote wilderness of Bohemia on a lonely shore. The tumultuous sea, the threatening sky, the vessel tossing at anchor, and that darkness which foretells the fierce battle of the elements, are a fit prelude to this black and portentous deed. The transition from the trial scene with its brilliant assemblage, and the heart-throes of kings and potentates, to this outward desolation, made blacker and more threatening by the shadow of the cruel wrong, thrills us with

“That spark divine,

Which makes the whole world kin;”

and Antigonus, as he unfolds his dream, clasping to his heart the forlorn little princess, adds another shadow to the general gloom.

According to Hermione's wish as expressed in his dream, the child is placed upon the breast of its mother earth—a pitiless breast for a new-born babe—and Antigonus' words, as he lays her tenderly down, sound as a requiem for his own ill-fated end so close at hand:

“Blossom, speed thee well! * * * Poor wretch!

That for thy mother's fault art thus exposed

To loss, and what may follow. Weep I cannot, ,

But my heart bleeds, and most accursed am I

To be by oath enjoined to this —— Farewell!

The day frowns more and more: thou art like to
have

A lullaby too rough: I never saw

The heavens so dim by day.”

Watching the ominous heavens, and alarmed by the sounds of the chase and the growing darkness, Antigonus hurries toward the ship which avenging fate forbids his reaching. The combined oppressiveness of nature, and the

cruel wrong are almost too heavy to be borne; and the wandering shepherd who breaks the spell, with his simplicity and vigor, brings life and hope to us anew. The hunters have terrified and scattered his sheep, and now, as he clambers down the rocky pass, we welcome him, and his manly voice and homely phrases become dear to us, as searching he stumbles upon this lambkin afar from its fold. With the superstition of peasant life he hesitates to touch the foundling, and in his fear calls loudly to his son; who, coming at his call, with face full of a great alarm, scarcely finds breath at once to tell what he has witnessed. But at last the facts are told of Antigonus hurrying to the shore, of the pursuit by wild beasts, and of his instant death, and of the storm which tossed and wrecked the vessel. The old shepherd now discloses his stranger experience, and opens the wrappings of the child; they find a casket and gold. They swear secrecy, and bear their new found treasures home.

Here there is a lapse of sixteen years, which is a grievous dramatic fault; but it is mended with consummate skill. The last scene of act third, serving to bridge the long interval, and preparing for the opening scenes of the fourth act, fixes the events in Bohemia, and leaves the baby princess in the care of the old shepherd. Besides, a personification of Time is introduced as chorus, and helps to join the severed periods, by preparing us for the growth of the princess Perdita, and for the appearance of Florizel, the princely son of Polixenes.

The two parts of the drama are utterly contrasting. The first movement hurried, stormy, passionate, a strife of conflicting sin and emotion; the last half, a sweet pastoral, brings us morning, and sunshine, and gladness, love and

roses, the tinkle of sheep bells, and music of murmuring brooks.

Rustic fun and rustic simplicity are here; and over all and beyond all, the actor of many rôles, Autolycus; the rogue so keen and witty that we forgive his villainy even in the midst of his most knavish tricks.

Once more we meet the king Polixenes, and Camillo. The king is inquiring anxiously for the young prince, Florizel, who absents himself too frequently from court. Camillo informs the king that rumor says the young prince passes his time at a certain shepherd's cot, and in the company of a most fair shepherdess. Polixenes bids Camillo to accompany him thither, and to-morrow, as that will be the festival of the sheep-shearing; and in disguise, that they may become a part of the group and see this fair maiden.

And now we must picture a roadway before the shepherd's cottage, and Autolycus stretched idly singing one of his snatches of song. He catches joy on the wing, and puts us in a merry mood, as listening to the shepherd's son, who wanders down the road, he sets a snare for the simple fellow.

He picks his pocket, learns of the festival, and plans further mischief. Autolycus is not merely a fellow of infinite variety, but he is a relic of bygone ways and methods, and is not only interesting in himself, but interesting in what he suggests.

The clown, the shepherd's son, throws light upon the influence of Perdita in the cottage, and shows us in a few words that his adopted sister is mistress of them all, as, repeating her message, he says: "What will this sister of mine do with rice? But my father has made her mistress of the feast, and she lays it on."

Scene third, act fourth, is full of a rich poetry, in perfect harmony with the spring of love in these pure souls, and we catch the very essence of joy and beauty as it is breathed from the sweet mingling of the whole. The shepherd's cottage, the grassy sweep of lawn, the porch all hung with blossoming vines, the tables spread beneath the trees, and lads and lasses in gay holiday garments, grouped about or flashing by in pairs, like happy birds. From the jarring clash and hurried movement of the first part of the drama, from its fierce battle with the strongest elements of our natures, from its pain and heartache, the restfulness of this scene comes to us as nature's sweet repose after her tempest and destruction. Soothed and comforted, we bathe our souls in its freshness, and rejoice in the innocence and sweetness of these youthful lovers. Is it not wonderful that the same power that has portrayed for us kings and courtiers, ripe manhood and womanhood, now opens to us this very spring-time of the heart?

Florizel, the son of Polixenes, a graceful prince, while hunting, has met the lovely Perdita in the meadows, as she watched her flock. Enamored by her beauty, he has sought her in her home, and there the enchantment was completed. Sweet Perdita has given her heart, but fears the consequences, now that Florizel has told her his rank. Perdita appears to us in holiday array, and Florizel has wreathed her with flowers; and gazing at her, says:

“These your unusual weeds to each part of you
Do give a life; no shepherdess, but Flora
Peering in April's front.”

In the course of the delicious love-warblings, Perdita lets us into her little trembling fear:

“ Even now I tremble
To think your father, by some accident,
Should pass this way, as you did.”

In spite of Florizel's strong assertions of his enduring love, through all trial, Perdita says: “ O lady fortune stand you auspicious.” The old shepherd now ushers in the guests, and playfully rebukes Perdita for being forgetful of her duty as hostess. Among the guests are King Polixenes and Camillo, in their disguise, and Perdita goes forward to greet them, and calling to Dorcas to bring her flowers, and with grace, which is nature, and spontaneity beyond all art, she bids them welcome, and bestows her flowers upon them. Polixenes is charmed with her graces, talks with her of her flowers, and is surprised at her bright replies; and Camillo, in his turn fascinated, says to the king, “ She is the very queen of curds and cream.” But the festival gaieties now prevent further conversation, and the rustic reel weaves itself to the vibrant sound of the fiddle, into a many hued ribbon, stretched across the green.

This scene is interrupted by a travelling pedler who joins the lively group. Singing, he opens his pack, and the lads and lasses gather about him like bees around a hive; it is the sly Autolycus who has disguised himself and now displays his wares:

“ Will you buy any tape,
Or lace for your cape,
My dainty duck, my dear-a?
Any silk, any thread, any lace for your head,
Of new'st and finest wear-a?”

Songs he sings to them and with them, sells all his goods and picks every pocket worth the rifling. In the meantime Polixenes, who has been questioning the old shepherd has

learned much of his son's devotion to the fair shepherdess, when Florizel, selecting from the guests his disguised father, and taking Perdita by the hand, calls upon him to "mark his contract." Tearing off his disguise in a passion, he answers the amazed prince:

"Mark your divorce, young sir,

Whom son I dare not call; thou art too base

To be acknowledged. Thou, a sceptre's heir,

That thus affect'st a sheep-hook!"

Then turning to the trembling Perdita:

"And thou, fresh piece

Of excellent witchcraft, who, of force, must know

The royal fool thou cop'st with;

I'll have thy beauty scratched with briars, and made

More homely than thy state."

But the poor old shepherd, who is innocent of Florizel's rank, is terrified beyond all, as the king turns his wrath upon him:-

"And thou, old traitor,

I am sorry that by hanging thee I can but

Shorten thy life one week."

Polixenes leaves the dismayed group—Florizel comforts his love, and the little maiden gathers her courage sufficiently to say:

"I was not much afeard; for once or twice

I was about to speak and tell him plainly,

The self-same sun that shines upon his court,

Hides not his visage from our cottage, but

Looks on all alike."

Florizel, whom we have enjoyed as a lover, now wins our respect as, rising superior to the difficulties about him, he communes with Camillo as to some plan by which, inde-

pendent of his father, he may marry the fair Perdita. Camillo, finding Florizel fixed upon a voyage in some direction, counsels him to turn his face towards Sicilia, the kingdom of Leontes, where he may be sure of a cordial welcome; and in this way hoping to bring about a reconciliation between the kings, and to visit once more his home.

Camillo makes all needful arrangements. Perdita and Florizel therefore embark, having first disguised themselves to prevent detection. Autolycus, who always happens upon the scene at the interesting moment, assists by lending his clothing, and assumes the court dress of Prince Florizel.

Meanwhile the poor old shepherd talks with his son as to the best method of appeasing King Polixenes' anger, and they decide to relate to the king all the facts in the finding of Perdita. This conversation is overheard by the omnipresent Autolycus, who being at this time in the garments of Prince Florizel, assumes the manners of the court, and strutting about under plea of helping them in their dilemma, sends them on shipboard in the same vessel with the runaways.

When the ship has fairly started upon its voyage, Camillo breaks the news to Polixenes, and all falls as he has planned. Polixenes proposes to follow the fugitives. This they do at once.

Florizel and Perdita arrive first, and are announced at the palace. King Leontes and Paulina receive them joyfully. Leontes is much struck with the resemblance of Perdita to Hermione. The scene is interrupted by a messenger who states that King Polixenes and Camillo have arrived in pursuit of the fugitives, and are awaiting Leontes in another room of the palace; thither Leontes leads the cast-down lovers.

The suggestions of the meeting in that other apartment of the palace would fill volumes, if each thread of these human lives, now drawn together by the mysteries of fate, could be followed. King Leontes, whose life for sixteen years has been a sacrifice upon the altar of his remorse, goes to meet his old friend, the injured Polixenes. Camillo, the faithful counsellor, with a love the dividing years have not weakened, awaits his king. The old shepherd and his son, with a sense of heavy responsibility, and uncertain which way it leads them, are come to reveal the secret of the finding the child upon the shore, and to show the mantle and jewels, those precious relics. Florizel, the noble-minded prince, invincible in his love, thwarted and crossed as it is; and sweet Perdita, clinging to her lover, yet as strong as the prince in her plighted affection, unconscious of her birthright, yet showing every inch a princess, growing as nature's violets, whose bloom is no less sweet, although the soil be poor and rough, is now to learn of her strange history, to rejoice in a father's love, and mourn a sainted mother. Paulina, whose strength of purpose made all reel before her, as she gave herself to the duty nearest her (in the early years of the drama), even to the peril of her life, now is the very prop of the grief-worn king; all her passionate love for the queen seems softened and hallowed, and proudly she holds her place in this gathering, and silently endures her part of the sacrifice, the loss of her husband, Antigonus.

Picture this meeting as we may, and it is food for reflection. The occasion is brilliantly described by a group of noblemen who were present, and proclaimed the glad tidings.

Rogero.—"Nothing but bonfires: the oracle is fulfilled,

the king's daughter is found: such a deal of wonder is broken out within this hour, that ballad-makers cannot be able to express it."

The old shepherd has told his story of the finding of the child — has shown the mantle and the jewels found about her —, and another nobleman brings the news. It is proved to be Hermione's mantle, by her jewel about the neck of it. A third nobleman states Paulina has urged the royal group to visit her gallery to see her famous statue of Hermione, sculptured by that rare artist, Julio Romano, and many years in doing. How full of Paulina's devotion is the next suggestion of one of the noblemen: "I thought she had some great matter there in hand; for she hath, privately, once or twice a day since the death of Hermione, visited that removed house." This inference blooms into beauty when the story is complete, and we see Paulina clearly.

If we have lived closely to each of these human lives, we know more surely than ever before, what the great spirit, creator, ruler, God, means, when close to virtue he places vice. We are made to see that virtue is the light of the soul which vice cannot extinguish; we know one ray of its glory was never lost although buried beneath mountains of sin. In all studies of the frailties of human lives about us, we get scarcely more than facts and immediate consequences; life is not long enough to learn the fruition, and humanity is silent as to life's deepest lessons. Here we see what havoc in the soul a base passion causes; we see its cruel power to blast and wither all it touches; but we are not left to wonder at God's injustice, nor to feel despair at life's misery, because we see the process, and can follow its labyrinthian ways. We know not merely cause and

effect, but the vital power given to the moral forces, through remorse, a consequent of sin, and love, the highest law of human life. King Leontes, whom, at one point of the drama, we despise, we pity in his despair; we take back to our hearts in his self abnegation and repentant life. And we rejoice at his just appreciation of Paulina's long and patient service.

The finale sweeps majestically over the whole, takes up tenderly the severed and tangled threads of these sacred human lives, unites the broken, unravels the snarled skein, and weaves anew each separate thread. Like richest organ music, in one great wave of sound blending all into harmony, the notes of discord, like the clash of arms; the trembling minors, like repentant tears.

The closing scene presents Paulina's gallery of art. The mysteriously united group, father and daughter, king and king, lover and mistress, are come at Paulina's request to see her statue of Queen Hermione. As Paulina, drawing aside the curtain, discloses the perfect counterpart, each separate being of the royal group stands transfixed before it. Out of a silence all eloquent with prayers and tears, Leontes speaks words which send the life-blood leaping through our human veins, until our hearts pulsate with his:

“Chide me, dear stone; that I may say indeed
 Thou art Hermione; or rather, thou art she,
 In thy not chiding; for she was as tender
 As infancy and grace.
 O thus she stood,
 Even with such life of majesty (warm life,
 As now it coldly stands), when first I woo'd her!
 I am ashamed: Does not the stone rebuke me
 For being more stone than it?”

* * * * *

The sixteen years of separation and remorse have purified and made whole his entire nature; his love for his beautiful queen the torturing years have but strengthened. As he gazes, lost to the world about him, what wonder that in this intensity he feels the statue moves. With suspended breath we follow his thought.

Paulina tries in vain to draw him from his growing consciousness of life and motion in the glorious form. Replying to her, yet never for one moment removing his eyes from the life-breathing figure before him, he speaks:

"Still methinks there is an air comes from her·

What fine chisel could ever yet

Cut breath? Let no man mock me,

For I will kiss her."

'Tis now Paulina's hour of triumph. For this moment she has given her soul's devotion through the emptied years. Seeing the way is prepared, the hour ripe with a promised fruition, she now awakens to life the statue-like Hermione, and her words, from their electric power, seem to give the vital spark to the marble form:

"Music! Awake her! strike.

'Tis time; descend; be stone no more; approach;

Strike all that look upon with marvel. Come;

I'll fill your grave up; stir, nay, come away;

Bequeath to death your numbness, for from him

Dear life redeems you. You perceive, she stirs."

Down from her lofty pedestal now steps the glorious queen, and turning towards Leontes, holds out forgiving arms. Not daring to believe his vision, Leontes starts back amazed. Paulina, leading him with loving touch, places his hand in Hermione's: "When she was young you woo'd her; now in age is she become the suitor." And

here, safe-folded in Hermione's arms, we leave the rejoicing king.

If students or readers glean but a part of the lessons these lives teach, they are broadened mentally and morally. If Leontes, in his passion, seems to demand more of mercy and charity than jealousy commonly demands, we must remember Leontes' soul was laid bare before us, and we were allowed to see every motion of heart and brain. Who of us, happily freed from the evils consequent upon mastering passions, could bear the sifting light through and through our calmer souls? Who of us are ready to believe "there is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety and nine just men who need no repentance?" We say it over and mumble it, but we do not live up to it. A deep moral lesson has been taught us in this dramatic form of King Leontes, real life can rarely give to us; and then we owe to his grievous fault such a train of towering virtues as else might never have grown so dear.

To Paulina we say adieu, as, all forgetful of self, she rejoices in the joy of these hearts about her. It is clear that these long years of her own widowhood she has filled with tenderest solicitude for the comfort and welfare of her beloved and self-exiled queen. It is clear that her truthful words to the king, in her effort to recall him to his better self, did not alienate Leontes' heart, for he, too, leans upon her strong spirit, and she is as openly necessary to him as invisibly the stay and consolation of Hermione. Whether she marries Camillo or no, as Leontes suggests, we cannot say, but we may be sure she did *not* "take some withered bough" and spend her days in lamenting. Grieve over the loss of Antigonus she doubtless did; but the current of her useful life was too strong to be turned now. If she did not

marry Camillo, she still gave her life in blessing all these lives about her. Yes! and blessing the broad world, who may claim her friendship as long as literature shall last.

For Perdita, having taken her to our hearts at once, we never need say adieu. She is ours, with her beauty and her freshness, forever and forever; and in life's cold and barren places, with an autumn in the heart, can waft to us the sunshine of a perpetual, blossoming spring.

For Florizel, love crowns him poet, and his pure, manly spirit crowns him prince; and although we know he owes much of his attraction to the reflected charm of Perdita's grace and beauty, we confess we love him because she does.

But Hermione still keeps her statuesque position, never descending from her pedestal. There she stands, monumental of all that makes a perfect woman. Borne from the court-room, at the close of her trial, in a fainting condition, she remained long in a swoon, which was death's counterfeit. Paulina believed her dead, and acted upon that belief. Recovering from that death in life, can we wonder at her wish still to be dead to all the world? We cannot conceive of this self-poised, calm-centred woman resuming her position as wife and queen. Her mind is too clear; her soul too upright. So she dwelt apart, awaiting the fulfilment of the oracle, that the child "that was lost should be found." Her silent forgiveness of her husband was eloquent with that love which means reconciliation. But it remains for Perdita to unite what she had separated. And now Hermione, turning from Leontes, places her hands upon that kneeling daughter's head, and all her heart gushes in her words:

“ You gods, look down,
And from your sacred vials pour your graces
Upon my daughter’s head.”

We may not put into words this essence of the soul, this divine afflatus, which, brimming from Hermione’s heart, fills ours to overflowing. But we have met with the gods on high Olympus, and our souls are fed.

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